

כְּשֵׁי מִלְחָמוֹת בְּעוֹלָם, הַשָּׂכָל מְחִיב שְׂיָהָיָה יְקָרוֹת

Wars, Rain and the Teacher in Prison

THE TEACHING

When there are wars (מִלְחָמוֹת) in the world, prices must rise, for bloodshed (שְׂפִיכוֹת דָּמִים) stirs the curse of Kayin: “לֹא תִסֵּף תֵּת כֹּחָהּ לָךְ” (בראשית ד:יב), “it will no longer give you its strength.” Rain begins below: “וַיֹּאדַם יִצְעָה מִן הָאָרֶץ” (בראשית ב:ו), “a mist rose from the earth”, and the mists (אֲדָמִים) become rain. In war those mists turn into bloodshed, “בְּעֵת אֵידָם” (יחזקאל לה:ה), so rain is held back.

This explains a puzzling Gemara. Rabbi Akiva was in prison, and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said to him: “רַבִּי, לְמַדְנִי תוֹרָה, וְאִם לֹא, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר לְיוֹחָי אָבִי וּמוֹסְרֶךָ לַמַּלְכוּת” (Shabbat 15a), “teach me Torah; if not, I will tell Yochai my father and hand you over to the government.” How could a student say this, and to one already in prison?

MAIN POINTS

- The reverse too: “בְּשַׁעַת גְּשָׁמִים אֲפֹלוּ גִיטוֹת פּוֹסְקוֹת בּוֹ” (תענית ח:), “when rain falls, even armies stop.”
- Rain comes through the honour of the Torah (כְּבוֹד הַתּוֹרָה): “וּכְבוֹד הִי נִרְאָה בְּעֵנֶן” (שמות טז:י). Teaching an unworthy student (תַּלְמִיד שְׂאִינוֹ הַגּוֹן) is “כְּזוֹרֵק אֶבֶן לְמַרְקוּלִים”, the reverse of honour, so it holds back rain: “כַּמְטֵר בְּקֶצֶר כֵּן לֹא נֹאֲוָה לְכַסִּיל כְּבוֹד” (משלי כו:א).
- New Torah draws Godliness (אֱלֹקוּת) into the listener's mind, a kind of captivity, “מִלֵּךְ אֶסּוּר בְּרִהְטִים” (שיר השירים ז:ו); into an unworthy mind it is real captivity, and its punishment is captivity.
- So Rabbi Shimon held that Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned for teaching crowds in public; prison refines those words, “וְאַתֶּם הָאֲסוּרוֹ וְיִבְחֲנוּ דְבָרֵיכֶם” (בראשית מב:טז), and teaching a worthy student now would repair the flaw.
- Revealing Torah reveals kindness (חֶסֶדִים), which comes from the father's side. Rabbi Akiva, a son of converts without ancestral merit (זְכוּת אֲבוֹת), felt in his humility he could not; in truth he had kindness of his own.
- So: “I will speak” Torah myself, with kindness from my father Yochai, and “hand you over”, against your will, to greatness (גְּדֻלּוֹת), until you must teach.

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Torah is honour; share it with care. And a teacher can be lifted by his students, when they speak the Torah they received.

In the full shiur: 1. When Wars Hold Back the Rain · 2. The Honour of the Torah · 3. I Will Speak to Yochai My Father

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